

Outline of Claims History

SETTLEMENT - PART TWO

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OLANGAPO CITY, P.I. —

In part one of this series, I compared the Native land claims battle to a chess tournament. One man would take exception to that analogy. His remarks were reported in the Tundra Times on June 27, 1969.

"We are not a chess game, we are human beings and right now are a very upset and disturbed people."

This was the reaction of Andrew Isaac, chief of the United Crow Band of Athabaskan Indians near Tanacross to the land loss suffered by his people and the combination of greed and negligence of government agencies responsible for that loss.

In a letter to former Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel, Chief Isaac requested assistance in determining the status of a petition for a reservation filed by the Tanacross group in 1917, and again in 1950.

"Our people in the cities feel money and what it can buy is important, we feel our land and what it has grown has fed, clothed, and helped us to survive, and is still doing so. Do you wonder why we are fighting to keep it?"

"We would like some answers to the questions we have asked you, we believe you are really interested in our problems, but so far no one has told us why we are being overlooked and our problems are growing instead of disappearing as we were told," stated Andrew Isaac.

Of the land used by Isaac's people, the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management has shuffled patents on an old village site, burial grounds, trapping camps, fishing sites and hunting areas to the State of Alaska. Such a cozy partnership typifies the manner in which Indian lands have been stolen throughout the American continent.

All groups of Alaska Natives have suffered some degree of

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land loss. Besides setting aside 40 million acres for patent to Natives, the settlement act of December 18, 1971 established a ceiling of 335 million acres for lands lost. One cause for resentment among Natives opposed to that settlement stems not from the fact that Alaska Natives received 40 million acres of land in simple fee title, but from the fact that the act gave legal sanction to the theft of the other 335 million acres in Alaska.

Among Native land lost forever are included grants to the churches, military reserves, individual homesteaders, tracts deeded to resource developers and speculators, and national parks and forests and wildlife refuges. The Tanacross story is not an isolated example.

Chief Isaac's unheeded appeal for justice brings to mind similar observations of land loss made by Indian leaders of the "lower forty-eight" in the not-so-distant past.

Chief Eagle Wing, in 1881 autobiography, cited by T. C. McLuhan in "Touch the Earth," said, "My brothers, the Indians must always be remembered in this land. Out of our languages we have given names to many beautiful things which will always speak of us. Minnehaha will laugh of us, Seneca will shine in our image, Mississippi will murmur our woes. The broad Iowa and the rolling Dakota and the fertile Michigan will whisper our names to the sun that kisses them. The roaring Niagara, the sighing

Illinois, the singing Delaware, will chant increasingly our Dta-wa-e (Death Song). Can it be that you and your children will hear that eternal song without a stricken heart? We have been guilty of only one sin - we have had possessions which the white man coveted. We moved away toward the setting sun: we gave up our homes to the white man.

"My bretheren, among the legends of my people it is told how a chief, leading the remnant of his people, crossed a great river, and striking his tipi-stake upon the ground, exclaimed 'Alabama.' This in our language means, 'Here we may rest.' But he saw not the future. The white man came: he and his people could not rest there: they were driven out, and in a dark swamp they were thrust down into the slime and killed. The word he so sadly spoke has given a name to one of the white man's states. There is no spot under those stars that now smile upon us, where the Indian can plant his foot and sigh 'Alabama.' It may be that Wakanda will grant us such a place. But it seems that it will be only at His side."

When the Indians of the lower forty-eight were threatened with the loss of their land, they either fought and died and were placed on reservations or, in the words of Eagle Wing, "moved away toward the setting sun."

(Next week: Delayed 100 years)